
The state of North Carolina is no stranger to uniquely named towns, but perhaps the most unusual name is that of Lizard Lick. A quick Internet search will turn up various stories relating to the origins of this name, all of which involve alcohol of dubious legality and, naturally, lizards licking said alcohol. Author Karen Matthews and illustrator Josh Taylor created this version of how the town became known as Lizard Lick as a family-friendly alternative to the original stories. Matthews is the owner of Carolina Souvenirs, the company that produced this book and on whose website the book can be purchased. Taylor's work as a graphic artist has been featured in other books and mediums.

The story's premise begins with a grandfather answering his young grandson's question about how the town of Lizard Lick got its name. The perspective then shifts to the lizards of Lizard Town, located on the shore of Sweetwater Pond, and the frogs of Frogville, located in the midst of the pond. The lizards and frogs have always been friendly until a severe drought threatens both the pond and their friendship. The lizards begin hauling water from the dwindling pond, and the frogs fear this will damage their homes. The frogs decide to take action by chasing off the next lizards who attempt to collect water, thus outraging the lizards. The mayors of Lizard Town and Frogville meet and decide that a track and field competition of three events will decide which group will be allowed to stay at the pond and which group will be forced to leave. The lizards and frogs each claim one victory, leaving the decision for the tug-of-war where the lizards narrowly defeat the frogs. Thus, the lizards "lick" the frogs and commemorate their victory by changing the name of their town to Lizard Lick. In a gesture of friendship, the lizards allow the frogs to stay at the pond as long as the water can be shared by all, and a welcome storm ends the drought.

This book is a light-hearted story accompanied by charming illustrations full of detail. However, the lessons that can be drawn from the story are a little confused. For example, the lizards' extension of forgiveness to the frogs occurs after they have renamed their town as a perpetual reminder of their victory. This seems ungenerous at best and deliberately mean at worst. The illustrations also lack the polish of conventionally edited and published children's books. Be aware that despite the title, this is not a typical folktale since the plot originated with Matthews. The book mentions this in the "Note to Parents" that also provides a short description of the actual town and the prevailing tales associated with its name. This book is recommended for collections with a special interest in North Carolina authors and stories.

Laura Gillis
formerly Forsyth County Public Library